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ANOTHER PAIR OF SPECTACLES

A Farce in One Act

BY

VICTOR BRIDGES

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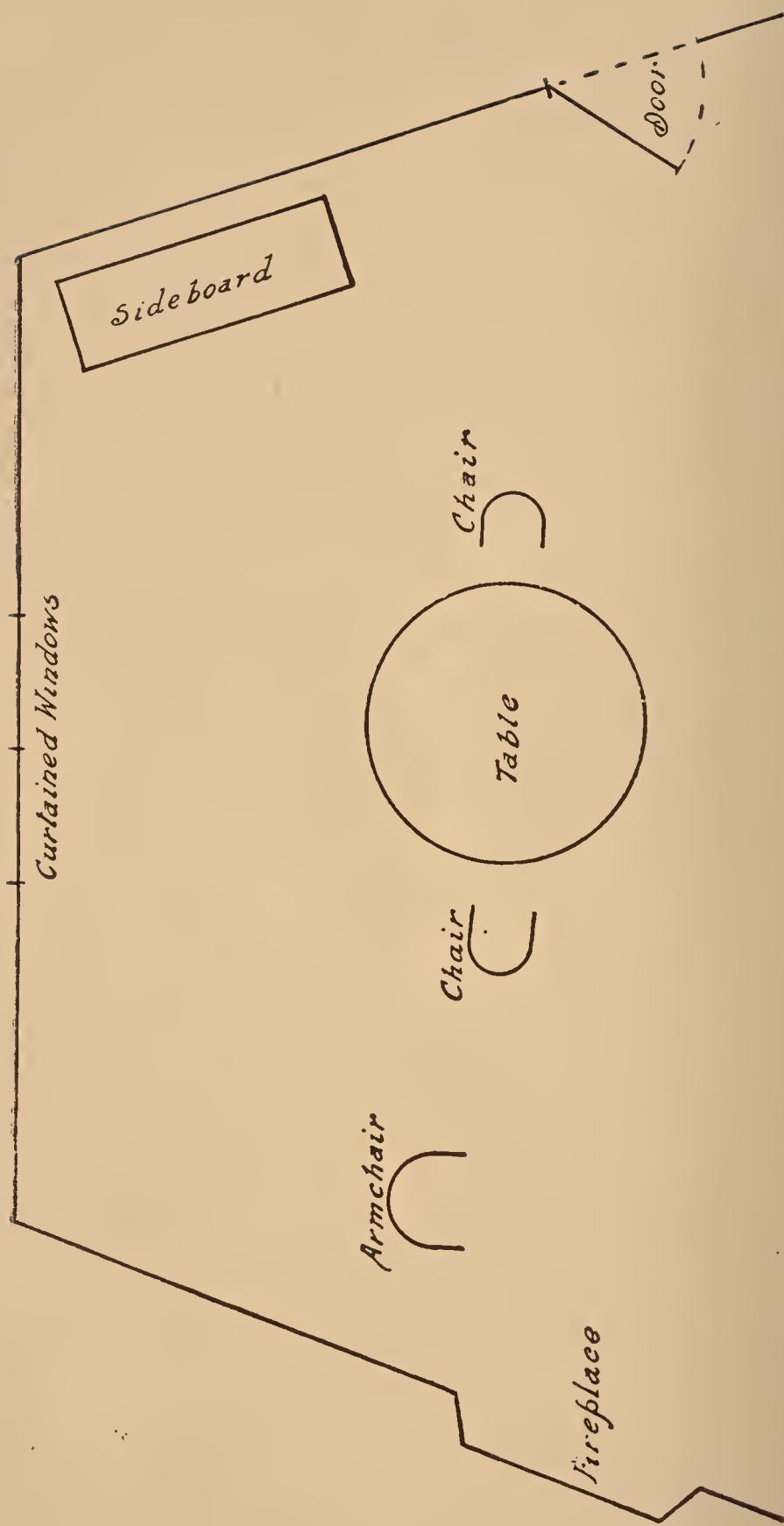
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ANOTHER PAIR OF SPECTACLES

CHARACTERS

GEORGE HASTINGS.
EVELEEN, *his Wife.*
CRIPPS, *his Butler.*

*



The above plan indicates all the furniture which is essential. In addition there should be other pieces to make the room look comfortable.

ANOTHER PAIR OF SPECTACLES

SCENE.—*A well-furnished dining-room in a small London house. Table in centre, at which MR. GEORGE HASTINGS and EVELEEN, his wife, in evening dress, are just concluding dinner. Fireplace on R. behind MRS. HASTINGS' chair. Fire burning. Above fireplace an easy-chair with an evening paper in it. Sideboard up L. The lights are pleasantly shaded. Some good sporting prints on walls. The whole atmosphere suggestive of philistine comfort.*

(As curtain rises, CRIPPS, the butler, is removing bread-crumbs from the tablecloth.)

GEORGE (*a youngish, good-looking man, glances at his watch*). What time does the bally thing start?

EVELEEN (*also young, pretty, and smartly gowned*). I'm not sure. It will be in the paper, I suppose. (*She glances round and sees paper in chair : makes a movement as if to reach for it. CRIPPS at once steps forward and, picking up the paper, hands it to her.*) Oh, thank you, Cripps. (*She opens it. CRIPPS goes to sideboard.*) Now let's see. Alhambra—Comedy—Court—Here we are—Lohengrin, eight o'clock!

GEORGE. It's an unholy hour, isn't it? There's no need for us to hurry, though. They always have a lot of music before the play actually begins. I suppose you don't mind if we're a bit late.

EVELEEN. Oh no, dear! As long as we get there by the time the King and Queen arrive.

(CRIPPS comes forward with the port.)

GEORGE. You can bring in the coffee, Cripps.

(Cripps places the port on the table and exits.)

GEORGE (*whistling a musical comedy air, gets up, and, strolling to sideboard, picks up a box of cigars, which he opens; he gives a slight start and turns*). Oh, I say, hang it all !

EVELEEN. What's the matter, dear ?

GEORGE. This is a bit too thick !

(Lowers his voice.) That blighter, Cripps, has been pinching my cigars again. (Comes forward with the box in his hand.) There were ten here last night, because I counted them. Now look ! (Holds out box.)

EVELEEN (*counting*). One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. He must have smoked two of them !

GEORGE (*bitterly*). One after breakfast and one after lunch. I expect he prefers a pipe at tea-time.

EVELEEN. It's perfectly disgusting ! And what's more, George, I have a suspicion that he drinks the wine. (She picks up decanter.)

GEORGE. I haven't. I'm dead certain of it !

EVELEEN. But what are we to do ?

GEORGE. Well, there you are. What can we do ? If we sack him and get another, it doesn't follow we shall be any better off. Cripps only drinks and smokes. Goodness knows what the next chap may be up to.

EVELEEN. Couldn't you say something to him ?

GEORGE. Oh yes, lots ! The trouble is that when you start accusing a man of stealing, you've got to have proof.

EVELEEN. But we know he did it !



aw

GEORGE. Legal proof, I mean.

EVELEEN. How ridiculous !

GEORGE. Yes, it does seem a bit unfair, doesn't it ? Still, that's neither here nor there. We've either got to catch him in the act or else surprise him into a confession.

EVELEEN (*despondently*). It would take a lot to surprise Cripps, I'm afraid.

(*A bell rings off.*)

GEORGE. What on earth's that ?

EVELEEN. The taxi, I suppose.

GEORGE. It can't be the taxi. I haven't ordered it yet.

(Enter CRIPPS, carrying a small corded box.)

CRIPPS (*coming to L. of table and placing box upon it*). A registered parcel for you, sir. (*He presents receipt.*)

GEORGE (*c., behind table, and getting out pencil*). For me ! Now, who the devil can that be from ? (*Signs.*)

(Exit CRIPPS with receipt.)

(EVELEEN passes over in front of the table and examines box. Suddenly claps her hands.)

EVELEEN. I know ! It's those Chinese curiosities that Uncle Philip said he was sending us. Oh, do open it, George ! I'm dying to see what they are.

GEORGE. Right-ho ! (*He goes to the sideboard and, returning with a table-knife, proceeds to saw at the cord. As he goes up EVELEEN moves to c., behind table.*) Just chuck us the poker, old thing, and I'll soon have the lid off.

(EVELEEN fetches a small poker from the grate and hands it to him. He inserts it, and prises up the lid of the box.)

EVELEEN. How exciting ! I wonder if there's anything we shall really like !

GEORGE (*L. of table and pulling out a large piece of cotton-wool*). There's plenty of cotton-wool, at all events. Jolly useful if we happen to get earache.

Hallo ! What's this ! (*He holds up a jade figure with a card tied to it.*)

EVELEEN. Let's see what's written on the card. (*She reads.*) "Jade figure of Tou Wang, a famous Chinese prophet of the Ming dynasty."

GEORGE. He looks a downy old bird, doesn't he ? I wish he'd give us the winner of the Cambridgeshire.

EVELEEN. Oh, hurry up, George ! I want to see what else there is.

GEORGE (*holding up a string of amber beads, reads.*) "Amber beads, a very holy relic taken from the statue of Buddha during the Boxer rebellion at Hang Chow."

EVELEEN (*taking them*). Aren't they sweet ! They'll just go beautifully with my new fancy dress !

(*Enter CRIPPS with coffee. He moves in front of table to r. side of EVELEEN, who is c. behind table.*)

GEORGE. What have we got now ? By Jove ! A pair of spectacles ! (*Holds up a pair of very big horn-rimmed spectacles.*)

EVELEEN (*helping herself to coffee*). Is there anything about them ?

GEORGE (*reading card*). "The identical spectacles worn by Ho-Sing-Lee, a Chinese magician of great repute in the eighteenth century. It is said that by their aid he was able to see into the past life of anyone with whom he was conversing."

(*CRIPPS, moving in front of table to l. side of GEORGE, hands him the coffee.*)

GEORGE. I say, that's a bit stiff, isn't it ?

EVELEEN. He must have had an awfully interesting life—if there's any truth in it.

GEORGE. Absolute bally rot, of course ! What do you think, Cripps ?

CRIPPS. I should hesitate to go as far as that, sir. I halways endeavour to keep an open mind on these subjects. There is no doubt that some Eastern persons possess very remarkable psychic powers. (*He moves up to place the tray on the sideboard.*)

(EVELEEN and GEORGE both look after him with a kind of half-humorous surprise. EVELEEN moves to arm-chair. Suddenly GEORGE, who is fingering the spectacles, gets an idea. In great excitement he comes to and nudges EVELEEN, points to the spectacles, and then to CRIPPS' back. Gives an idea in pantomime of what he is about to do.)

GEORGE. We can easily find out, anyway. (*Puts the spectacles on.*)

EVELEEN. You look exactly like Mark Hambourg.

(CRIPPS turns round from sideboard.)

GEORGE. Now for the great experiment. (*He wheels suddenly round and faces CRIPPS. EVELEEN watches him with suppressed amusement.*)

(*For a moment the two men face each other. Then suddenly GEORGE gives a violent start.*)

GEORGE. Good heavens !

EVELEEN. What is it ?

CRIPPS. What's the matter, sir ?

GEORGE. Cripps, you've been smoking my cigars !

(CRIPPS staggers back and clutches the sideboard. He makes an effort as though about to deny it, but GEORGE breaks in again.)

GEORGE. It's no use tryin' to deny it, Cripps ! I can see you plainly. You are sittin' in the pantry after breakfast. You put your hand into your inside pocket. You pull out two cigars. One of them you lay aside for after lunch. You cut the other very carefully. You shove it into your mouth. You light it. It is one of my half-crown Cabanas ! (*Wipes his forehead.*)

EVELEEN. This is marvellous ! George, let me have those spectacles for a moment.

(With a prodigious wink GEORGE hands them to EVELEEN. She puts them on, crosses in front of GEORGE, and faces the unfortunate CRIPPS, who is still clutching the sideboard.)

CRIPPS. I assure you, sir——

EVELEEN. Cripps! You've been drinking the wine!

(CRIPPS, *who is just stepping forward again, collapses into his former position.*)

EVELEEN. I can see you at the sideboard. You are bending down and opening the cupboard.. You take out



a decanter. You fill a glass—a large glass, Cripps. You drink it! It is our port!

GEORGE. Eight-and-sixpence a bottle, and swiggin' it by the tumbler!

EVELEEN (*reproachfully*). This is very distressing to me, Cripps. I did think that you could be trusted. If it hadn't been for these spectacles I should never have dreamed that you were dishonest. (*Places spectacles on table.*)

CRIPPS. Really, madam, I——

EVELEEN. I will leave Mr. Hastings to speak to you.
(To GEORGE.) I am going upstairs to put on my cloak, George. Don't forget the taxi.

(*She crosses to the door and exits.*)

(GEORGE takes up a commanding position in front of the fire and clears his throat. Looks sternly at CRIPPS.)

GEORGE. Well, Cripps, what have you got to say for yourself ?

CRIPPS (*somewhat recovering from the first shock*). I can only observe, sir, that these accusations are extremely painful. It is the first time in the whole of my professional career in which my—er—bona fides has been called in question.

GEORGE. That's all very well, Cripps ; but there's no getting away from the facts, is there ? We can't both of us have been wrong—what ? I thought the whole thing was a yarn when I first read the card, but, as you yourself said, some of these Eastern jossers possess a very remarkable thingumy-bob.

CRIPPS (*in front of sideboard*). May I inquire, sir, what steps you propose to take in the matter ?

GEORGE (*loftily*). Well, I don't want to deal too hardly with you, Cripps. You've been a good servant in most ways, and I suppose if I was to give you the sack you'd find it devilish difficult to get another place—what ? (*He knocks off the end of his cigar into the fireplace.*) I tell you what it is, Cripps. I'll do the sportin' thing by you. I'll let you have another chance.

CRIPPS. You are very kind, sir.

GEORGE (*moving up the room and back again*). All the same, something's got to be settled about this business. (*Nods towards the sideboard.*) You've been helpin' yourself to my wine and cigars, and you'll jolly well have to pay for it ! I know what I shall do. I shall stop your wages for a month !

CRIPPS (*coming forward c. to behind table*). I suppose, sir, there can't be any mistake with regard to those spectacles ?

GEORGE. Mistake ! What do you mean ?

CRIPPS. There's no doubt, sir, that they're the genuine harticle ? (*Fingers them.*)

GEORGE. I should jolly well think so ! You've had a pretty good example of the way they work.

CRIPPS. Yes, sir. It was most interesting and remarkable. (*Picks them up.*) I wonder, now, if you'll excuse me, sir. (*Puts them on.*)



GEORGE. Here ! I say, what the devil are you doing, Cripps ?

CRIPPS (*staring at GEORGE*). Good 'eavens !

GEORGE (*behind EVELEEN'S chair*). Have you gone mad ?

CRIPPS. I can see you in such a funny place, sir ! It looks like the lift of an hotel. There's a lady with you, sir—a young lady, with red hair.

GEORGE. R-r-red hair !

CRIPPS. Halmost scarlet, sir. You're getting out now, and you've taken her arm. You're walking along a passage. There's a halcove. You're—you're kissing the lady—

GEORGE. Shut up, you fool ! (*He dashes across the stage and plants his back against the door ; pauses.*) I say, Cripps, who on earth told you about this ?

CRIPPS. No one, sir. I just seen it through the spectacles. (*Takes them off and lays them on table.*)

GEORGE. Good lord ! (*He collapses against the door.*)

CRIPPS. I'm afraid it will be my duty to inform the mistress, sir !

GEORGE. What ! I say, Cripps, you wouldn't do a dirty thing like that !

CRIPPS. Well, sir, I—

GEORGE. Of course, I was only joking about stopping your wages for a month. You don't suppose I really grudge you an occasional cigar or a glass of port. Hang it all ! Everyone feels thirsty at times !

CRIPPS. Quite so, sir.

GEORGE. Live and let live, Cripps—eh, what ?

CRIPPS. A very good motto, sir.

GEORGE. The whole affair can be easily settled. It's only just a question of making your peace with Mrs. Hastings. She's very fond of you, Cripps—thinks the world of you really. Just tell her you're sorry—sudden temptation—you know the sort of thing.

CRIPPS. Yes, sir. I think I've got the idea all right.

GEORGE. Hush ! She's coming ! Now's your chance, Cripps.

(GEORGE moves away from door. Enter EVELEEN.)

GEORGE. Ah ! There you are, darling ! I say, you look top-hole ! What a rippin' cloak !

EVELEEN. I'm so glad you like it. Have you spoken to Cripps, George ?

GEORGE. Oh yes—yes—we—we've had it out together. (EVELEEN crosses over to fireplace. GEORGE makes a sign to CRIPPS.) He's frightfully sorry, you

know, and all that sort of thing. In fact, I think he'd like to tell you so himself. I'll just pop along to the 'phone and order the taxi. (*He makes another sign to Cripps and exits.*)

EVELEEN (*turning and speaking with great dignity*). I was pleased to hear what Mr. Hastings said, Cripps. If you are sorry for your conduct, if your conscience is really troubling you, it is just possible that I might be prepared to overlook the matter.

CRIPPS (*c., behind table*). You are very kind, madam.

EVELEEN (*sitting in arm-chair*). I hope you will appreciate it, and I hope, too, that this painful affair will be a lesson to you for the rest of your life. When you do wrong, Cripps, it's never any use trying to conceal it. Sooner or later the truth is bound to come out.

CRIPPS. It would certainly appear so, madam.

EVELEEN (*warming her hands and warming to her theme at the same time*). As my grandmother used to say: "Providence has its own ways of working." It is quite possible that these spectacles were sent to us for this special purpose.

CRIPPS. I shouldn't be surprised, madam. (*He puts them on and looks at Eveleen, who has half turned away towards the fire.*)

EVELEEN. You can see for yourself, Cripps——

CRIPPS. Good 'eavens !

EVELEEN (*turning sharply round*). What !

CRIPPS (*at the side of the arm-chair*). It can't be true !

EVELEEN. What can't be true ?

CRIPPS. I seem to see you in such a funny position, madam.

EVELEEN (*rising*). What do you mean ? What are you talking about ?

CRIPPS. You're lying back in a chair in a kind of conservatory. There's a young gentleman with you—a tall, good-looking young gentleman, not a bit like Mr. 'Astings.

EVELEEN. Cripps !

CRIPPS. I think you must have been dancing together, because you're both sort of flushed and excited.

He's bending over you, madam—he's holding your hand.

EVELEEN. Hush ! Hush !

CRIPPS. He's coming nearer to you. He's kissing you !

EVELEEN. Stop ! Stop ! For Heaven's sake don't speak so loud. (*She crosses stage hastily and listens at door. Faces Cripps.*) Cripps, you've been spying on me !

CRIPPS. Certainly not, madam. I'd scorn the haction !

(*He moves in front of the table to down L.C.*)

EVELEEN. Then—then how did you know ?

CRIPPS. It seemed to come to me when I looked through the spectacles.

EVELEEN (*intensely agitated*). The spectacles ! It must be true, then, after all ! (*Feverishly.*) Listen, Cripps, you—you've got hold of quite the wrong idea. It was all a mistake ! He mistook me for somebody else !

CRIPPS. Yes, madam. He looked rather a careless sort of gentleman.

EVELEEN. And yet, if a thing like that came out it might ruin one's whole life.

CRIPPS (*sympathetically*). I know, madam. I had a very narrow escape myself once.

EVELEEN (*clasping her hands*). I can't imagine what I should do if anyone were to tell Mr. Hastings.

CRIPPS (*gallantly*). As a man of honour, madam, I should never dream of betraying a lady's confidence.

EVELEEN. No, no, I'm sure you wouldn't ! I always thought you had nice feelings. (*She pauses.*) And—and, Cripps, if you're so fond of cigars, why, of course, you must have them. I'll buy you a couple of boxes myself.

CRIPPS (*hastily*). Thank you, madam ; but if it's all the same to you, I think I'd prefer to choose them.

EVELEEN. You shall, Cripps, you shall ! I—

(*She starts and crosses over to the fireplace.*) There's Mr. Hastings. You go away for a moment. I'm almost sure I can persuade him to forgive you.

CRIPPS. I shouldn't be surprised, madam.

(Enter GEORGE. *He glances apprehensively from EVELEEN to CRIPPS.*)

GEORGE. I—I've rung up for a taxi. It's just coming.

EVELEEN. Thank you, darling. (To CRIPPS.) Just go and get my bag, will you, Cripps. I left it in the drawing-room.

(Exit CRIPPS.)

GEORGE (c., in front of table, nervously). Been—been givin' him beans—what?

EVELEEN. I didn't like to be too hard on him, dear. He seems awfully sorry for what he's done.

GEORGE. Yes, I noticed that.

EVELEEN. And when people really repent, George, don't you think that we ought to try and forgive them?

GEORGE. Rather! Just my notion!

EVELEEN. We're all human. Any of us might make a mistake.

GEORGE (with enthusiasm). That's exactly what I always say. (Pauses, then adds, in a half-ashamed sort of voice.) You know, old thing, you really are a bit of an angel. I'm not half good enough for you!



EVELEEN. Don't say that, George. You're—you're a perfect dear ! (*She comes up to him and puts her arms round him.*) You do love me, don't you ?

GEORGE (*hugging her*). You bet I do !

EVELEEN. And you've never cared for anyone but me ?

GEORGE (*firmly*). Never !

EVELEEN. And I've never cared for anyone but you.

GEORGE. Rippin' !

(*They kiss each other. A bell rings off.*)

EVELEEN (*disengaging herself*). That must be the taxi. Oh, George, you haven't rumpled my hair, have you ?

GEORGE. Not a rump ! You look top-hole !

(*Enter CRIPPS.*)

CRIPPS. The taxi is at the door, madam.

(EVELEEN moves over towards the door. GEORGE crosses to fireplace and throws the stump of his cigar into the fire.)

EVELEEN (*hastily aside to CRIPPS*). Don't worry, Cripps. I've arranged everything.

CRIPPS. You are very kind, madam.

(*Exit EVELEEN.*)

GEORGE (*recrosses stage*). It's all right, Cripps. I've fixed it up for you.

CRIPPS. You are very good, sir. (*Prepares to follow.*)

GEORGE. You needn't trouble. We can see ourselves into the taxi.

(*Exit GEORGE, closing door behind him.*)

(CRIPPS comes to table, automatically helps himself to a cigar and pours out a glass of port.)

CRIPPS. It ain't often one backs two winners in one day ! (Drinks.)

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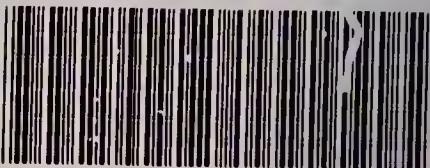
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